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*courage is contagious*

## Viewing cable 09LONDON445, IRAN: JOURNALIST PROPOSES BASKERVILLE DOCUMENTARY

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09LONDON445**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09LONDON445	2009-02-19 16:31	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET//NOFORN	Embassy London

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2011/04/17/112290/state-department-cables-reveal.html>

P 191631Z FEB 09  
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1433  
INFO IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T LONDON 000445

NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/18/2019  
TAGS: [KPRP](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PROP](#) [IR](#) [UK](#)  
SUBJECT: IRAN: JOURNALIST PROPOSES BASKERVILLE DOCUMENTARY  
TO HELP SET POSITIVE TONE, IMPROVE U.S.-IRAN RELATIONS

REF: EMB LONDON (GAYLE) E-MAIL SENT 2/18/09 TO NEA/IR  
AND IIP/NEA-SCA

Classified By: Classified By: Political Counselor Richard Mills, Jr. for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: A UK-Iranian dual citizen journalist and historian told London Iran Watcher (poloff) he seeks USG support to make a 50-minute documentary, to be filmed during 2009 in Iran, UK and the United States, about Howard Baskerville, the American teacher who was in the past beloved in Iran for his 1909 martyrdom there in the cause of Iran's

Constitutional Revolution. The journalist, who has in the past worked for IRNA, an official Iranian news agency, and has visited the United States frequently, is previously known to Poloff and is respected by Poloff's trusted Iranian expatriate contacts. The journalist provided written details which Poloff has forwarded to Department (ref). End Summary.

#### Journalist: Baskerville Story Sets Positive Tone for Engagement

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12. (S/NF) Poloff met February 18 with an Iranian free-lance (formerly IRNA) journalist, now a UK citizen, who had attended a February 12 Embassy-sponsored media symposium on Iran, to hear details on the journalist's desire to promote Howard Baskerville's centennial. The journalist described an effective commemoration by both Iranian and U.S. audiences of Baskerville's ideals and sacrifices as a way to help set a positive public tone inside Iran as the two governments move toward political engagement. The journalist said the role American financier Morgan Shuster played in early American support for Iranian development and independence would also resonate with the Iranian public, but said he prefers to start with Baskerville's more dramatic story.

13. (S/NF) The journalist, who has during his time in the UK moved among several employers, describes himself as in theory opposed to "velayet e faqih" but in practice is a pragmatist who supports incremental movement toward improved bilateral relations and more generally open government and society in Iran. He visits Iran frequently but has lived with his wife and children in the UK for almost ten years; he is willing to travel to the U.S. (he has a UK passport), which he has visited four times, to meet Department officials if requested.

#### Proposal's Details

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14. (S/NF) The journalist gave Poloff a three-page written grant proposal to support the making of a 50-minute documentary, to be filmed over two months in Iran, UK, and the United States; Poloff forwarded the document and identifying information on the journalist to Department (ref) proposal. Project cost would be 30,000 pounds sterling (USD 45,000 at current rates) - he was adamant this would cover all costs of filming in UK, Iran and U.S. and that total film and production time would take two months from project approval. Further details:

-- Other Personnel: He told Poloff he has film editors, cameramen, script writer, and research assistants already in mind, and probably available, but says he has not yet, for security reasons, discussed the project with anyone other than VOA contractor XXXXXXXXXXXX;

-- Language: the documentary would be shot in both Persian and English according to interviewee and dubbed as appropriate; he wants not to rely on subtitles, and to have two versions (English and Persian) of the work;

-- Sources: the journalist said he has located numerous contemporary memoirs and other unpublished sources on turn-of-the-century Iran, in addition to the well-known historical treatments of Baskerville, that he argued could enrich the documentary's account of Baskerville's life and of U.S.-Iranian relations during that era. He provided as an example verbal background on one multi-volume set of Iranian contemporary memoirs he had traced from Iran and the UK to the Bryn Mawr College library. Poloff asked the journalist to provide, in support of the proposal, further written details on sources and locations he proposes to use in filming the U.S. portion; Poloff will report these when available.

-- Dissemination/public broadcast: would primarily be via VOA Persian; the journalist commented VOA is in his view at risk of being trounced in the Iranian market by BBC Persian's

freshness and appeal to younger Iranian viewers, but his political and news coverage sympathies appear to lie with VOA. He said VOA can improve its format and programming and increase its impact by imitating much of what BBC Persian is doing. The journalist is very much against trying to disseminate any Baskerville materials via BBC Persian: he argued BBC would resist such a report, as being on an inherently anti-British theme. He also opined the BBC would not in any case touch anything with USG fingerprints or more generally anything they had not controlled from the outset.

-- Security/regime repression: The journalist, who travels to Iran periodically, did not volunteer but was, in response to questions, adamant he could shoot all necessary Iranian footage by contracting a private Iranian firm (which he did not name) to handle the Iran filming. He said the work in Iran would be a project internal to Iran, with no foreign component or application; he was confident he would not need to engage regime authorities on the project, thereby avoiding any need for political clearance or formal permitting. The journalist made it clear he would not be sharing complete information with his Iran contractor and he was confident neither they nor others in Iran would ask any questions as long as the true nature of the project was not signaled. Poloff made it clear USG could not be his advocate in the event he fell afoul of Iranian authorities. The journalist said he was willing if necessary to travel to Washington to discuss his proposal with Department officials.

Comment

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15. (S/NF) Poloff would usually dismiss such an approach as a possible IRIG provocation or manipulation, but believes this proposal merits USG consideration. Poloff has observed this individual, in many London settings public and private over the last two years, has utterly lacked the rhetorical markers and "regime talking points" approach normally seen among those many Iranian residents of the UK easily identifiable as IRIG supporters or minions. Additionally this journalist is (not embraced but) trusted by long-term Embassy contacts among the Iranian expatriate community, a group which is not shy about "outing" IRIG sympathizers. Above all, however, his proposal promotes an historical episode (Baskerville) which offers IRIG propagandists little if any angle to spin or exploit: the unvarying anti-U.S. narrative mined by regime propagandists rarely reaches back before the 1953 Mossadegh overthrow, precisely because of the mostly benign themes reflected in U.S.-Iran relations during that period. Pre-1953 is a period in which regime propagandists tend to focus on Russian or UK perfidy, and not on America's role.

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